



Klamath Network Featured Creature

November 2008

Northern White Skipper (*Heliopetes ericetorum*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

As viewed from above, males (top image) are pearly white with black chevron chains along the wing margin and blue-gray close to the body. Females have more black chevron chains across the wings, not just on the margins as with the males, and the blue-gray color close to the body extends farther onto the wings. From below, both sexes are banded with white and light brown. As a caterpillar, this species is yellow-green and marked lengthwise with yellow and green stripes.

Similar Species:

The female Northern White Skipper can be mistaken for the Common Checkered Skipper; however, the Northern White Skipper is larger. Their ranges may overlap in northern California and southern Oregon and they both use mallows for their larval food plant. Males can be mistaken for species of Whites, but the skipping flight of the Northern White Skipper will distinguish it from a White species.

Life History:

Single eggs are laid on the young leaves of host plants, which include species in the mallow family and *Fremontia*. The caterpillars are pale green with yellow stripes and black heads. The caterpillars feed on the leaves of the host plant and can build mummy-bags of rolled leaves and silk to hibernate in over winter. The pupa (chrysalis) is tan, pink, and blue. The adult butterflies emerge in two or three broods. Adult Northern White Skippers feed on the nectar of many different flowers and rotting fruit, and they visit mud puddles and animal dung to gain essential nutrients. Males are territorial and patrol around host plants. These butterflies are on the wing from May through September.

What's in a Name?

The group of butterflies called Skippers refers to their skipping flight pattern, due to their relatively short wings (3.2-3.8 cm) and larger, heavier bodies. The scientific name describes this butterfly's habits quite well: *Heliopetes* (sun-flier) *ericetorum* (of the heath).



Photo by Sue Anderson, taken at Lava Beds National Monument



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More Information:

Butterflies and Moths of North America:
<http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org>

Digital Atlas of Idaho:

<http://imnh.isu.edu/digitalatlas/bio/insect/butrfly/famhagn/heer/heerf.htm>

Habitat:

The Northern White Skipper occupies open woodlands, shrublands, dry washes, desert mountains, and arid lands.

Where to see it in the Klamath Parks:

The Northern White Skipper has been confirmed at Lava Beds, and might also be found at Whiskeytown NRA, Lassen Volcanic NP, and possibly Crater Lake NP.

Distribution:

The confirmation of the Northern White Skipper at Lava Beds represents an extension of its previously known range and a record for Siskiyou County, CA. Its previously recorded range includes Baja California Norte, southern and central California, Arizona, western New Mexico, western Colorado, Utah, Nevada, parts of Idaho, eastern Washington, and eastern Oregon. Lepidopterist Robert Michael Pyle states, "It appears sporadically and can seldom be predicted."

Did You Know?

The Northern White Skipper is the only one of its group (White Skippers) to occupy a temperate region. All other White Skippers of North America (five species) occur in Mexico and barely into the United States (southern California, southern Arizona, southern New Mexico, or southern Texas).